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SUBJECT: Colonel Catalino CHAVEZ's Views on Last November Military Uprising and on Guatemalan Politics.

Colonel Catalino CHAVEZ Pérez, recently selected by Congress as First Designate to the Presidency of the Republic, told me today something of his background and opinions. He has admiration and affection for President YDIGORAS whom he has known ever since Ydígoras was his teacher at the Escuela Politecnica (Military Academy) from which Chávez was graduated in 1924. He has been a professional soldier ever since, except during the ten-year span (1944-54) of the AREVALO and ARBENZ Governments, during which he underwent great moral suffering and was hard pressed to feed and clothe his wife and four children. He takes great pride in being one of the few senior colonels who had no association whatsoever with those governments. After CASTILLO Armas's successful liberation of the country, Chávez was called back to active duty as third chief of the Guardia de Honor regiment. Within a few months, he became second chief and then regimental commander, a position he held until a few months ago when an attack (he described it as a nasal hemorrhage) forced him to restrict his activities. Since then, the President gave him the sinecure of Director of the Military Hospital, a position he now holds, and included his name in the tern submitted to Congress for the selection of First and Second Presidential Designates. While still a lieutenant, he was Third Designate to the Presidency and also Deputy Commander of the Presidential General Staff under President UBICO. He has been a full colonel twenty-five years.

I asked Colonel Chávez, in entire candor and confidence, to tell me what really was behind the last November 13 unsuccessful military uprising and the present alleged and apparent plots and conspiracies against the Ydígoras Government. He said that, as he saw it, a large share of the responsibility for last November's uprising could be ascribed to unhealthy, leftist (he used the word Marxist) teaching in the Men's Normal School and the Instituto Nacional Central de Varones (INCV). During the Arévalo and Arbenz regimes, the "camaradas" made substantial inroads in the teaching profession and many of these high school teachers "poisoned" the minds of and "deceived" many of the youth in those two institutions. Some of those "engañados" (deceived ones), who were taught much about "rights" but little about "responsibilities," went on to the Military Academy. These were the ones principally involved in the November uprising. The same types were responsible for a similar and also aborted uprising against Castillo Armas.

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As for the colonels and older officers who were involved, they were generally unstable, unduly ambitious, or "leftists." In the case of Colonel LLERENA Müller, for example, he is well known to be emotionally and mentally unstable. Some of the other older men were simply unduly ambitious and/or "leftist" in the sense that they yearned to regain positions of prominence and influence they had under Arévalo and Arbenz. For example, Colonel Ernesto PAIZ Novales, who was recently arrested on suspicion of plotting, was Under Secretary of National Defense when Arbenz was Minister of National Defense and later, after Arbenz became President, was named Director of the Escuela Politecnica. Similarly, Colonel José Domingo VALLE held responsible positions in the Arévalo and Arbenz Governments. They were of a stripe, he said, with Colonel PAZ Tejada. While it would be inaccurate to classify such men as "Communists," they could be classified as "leftists" because of their associations with, and affinity for, leftist governments in which they had important jobs. He also said their ambition and opportunism made them susceptible of exploitation by dissident political elements, including Communists.

As for the present and future, Colonel Chávez thought President Ydígoras would be able to control the situation and to finish out his term but not without considerable annoyance from ambitious and unhappy elements. The active duty officer corps was not entirely purged of elements that could cause the President trouble. Constant vigilance was required to keep on top of the situation.

On the question of who might be the next President of Guatemala, Colonel Chávez threw up his arms and said "There will be a score of candidates." At the mention of CRUZ Salazar's name, he grimaced and commented that Cruz did not have the intelligence to make a good President. He grimaced also at the mention of Mario MENDEZ Montenegro, commenting that he was an untrustworthy and opportunistic individual who was too closely associated with the left to be a safe bet for Guatemala's future. On the subject of Miguelito YDIGORAS, he again grimaced and said that, while Miguelito was a nice enough fellow, a dynasty thing like that would smack of SOMOZA and TRUJILLO and would be bad. He emphasized there would be a score of candidates and that, as of now, it was simply "anybody's ball game."

Robert Foster Corrigan
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.